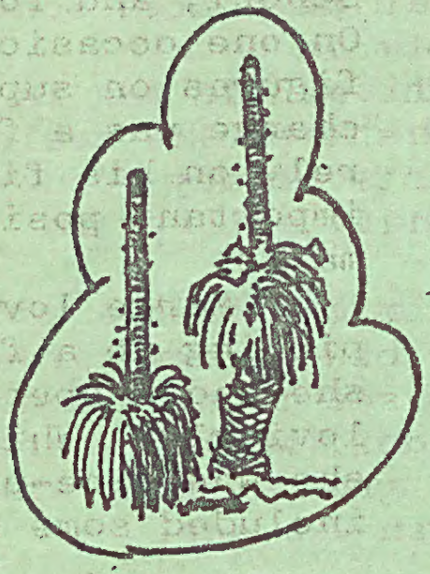


FIELD NATURALISTS' CLUB OF BALLARAT

EXCURSION/NEWS SHEET - APRIL 1979

President: Mr. R. Borch Ph. 428630
Vice-Pres: Mr. G. Binns 323670
Secretary: Miss H. Burgess 312210
Treasurer: Mr. S. Reynolds 327721
Committee: Mr. L.Fink, Mr. P. Fry, Mrs. B. Gray (Editor), Mr. K.Hammond, Dr. F. Harrap, Mrs. M. Rotheram.

Meetings held in the Administrative Building at the School of Mines, Lydiard St. Sth. first Friday of each month at 8 p.m.

MEETING 6th APRIL: Mr. Bill Davis will be favouring us by showing the film "Last Day of a Wilderness" and members are invited to make a donation towards the Australian Conservation Foundation on the night.

MEETING 4th MAY: Mr. Barry Kentish - Black Bird Research.

EXCURSION 8th APRIL: Leigh River, Grenville, Mt. Mercer Area. Leader L. Fink. Leaving Crockers corner 1.30 p.m.

EXCURSION 6th MAY: Trawalla and Bittern Lagoon. Leaving Crockers 9.30 a.m. Lunchtime meeting place announced at the April meeting.

SYLLABUS CARDS are available now. When stamped by the Treasurer, they are your pass to procure any books from our library.

MEMBERSHIP FEES are now due. Adults $2.50, Full-time tudents 50cents.

OBITUARY - MISS M. HATFIELD - 7th MARCH 1979.

Miss Marge Hatfield spent a great deal of her life in and around Ballarat. After studying at Melbourne Universit she became a teacher of mathematics as many Ballarat people

will know. For many years she taught at Ballarat High School, and for several years at Ballarat East High School. On one occasion she arranged an interview to obtain figures on superannuation. To her surprise, the man in charge was a former student of hers; she knew she could rely on his figures. Many of her former students occupy important positions, gained partly by their ability in maths.

Marge loved to pack a lunch and go out into the bush, picking up a friend or two on the way. In her own garden she had a special spot for native plants which she tended lovingly. While teaching at Ballarat High School, where she was vice-principal, she organized a nature group which included some keen students; Roger Thomas was one.

In 1961 she became a member of Ballarat Field Naturalists Club, and was President from 1966-69.

Marge took an interest in many different charities visiting elderly folk at the Queen Elizabeth Home, helping with the Lakeside Auxiliary. She took several trips overseas and entertained many visitors to Ballarat. Marge attended St. Peter's Church, belonged to the Horticultural Society, was Treasurer of the Ballarat branch of the Aust. Federation of the University Women Graduates. Recently she attended a conference of graduates in Scotland. She lived a full, active life, was always ready to help people she met, and she had a wide circle of friends. Ballarat naturalists will long remember Miss Hatfield, and her sound contribution to the cause of natural history.

Mary D. White.

"IMPACT OF WATER DEVELOPMENT ON AQUATIC LIFE."

An extremely interesting lecture on the impact of reservoirs on aquatic ecosystems was given by John Blythe, Head of the Department of Environmental Survey, during the March meeting of the Ballarat Field Naturalists.

There is an ever increasing demand for water in Victoria for domestic, industrial and agricultural use.

This has required many unique freshwater streams and rivers to be dammed. John pointed out that apart from the obvious destruction of flora and fauna above the dam wall due to the rising water level, more subtle, but equally as destructive changes occur downstream. Changes in the hydrological cycle, flow rate, temperature, suspended solids and nutrient concentrations have sufficient impact to destroy the stream ecosystem. Mr. Blythe's 35 mm slides illustrated how a fast flowing stream, rich in a diverse fauna can be changed to a sluggish, eutrophicated series of freshwater pools after the erection and operation of the dam. This was particularly the case of the Dartmouth and Thompsons Rivers.

However, there is some hope as notice is now being taken of this inevitable destruction of ecosystems and engineers are modifying their plans to try to emulate the original water regime.

After the lecture a vigorous and stimulating question time showed the interest of the members in the topic. In summary, John Blythe stated that the increase in demand for more water could be attributed directly to the public sector. It is this demand for more water which is used only to irrigate gardens that is causing the destruction of fragile, diverse and rare ecosystems. Perhaps this point should be borne in mine the next time we turn on the hose!!

B. J. Kentish 5-3-79.

ENFIELD EXCURSION 4-3-1979.

This afternoon outing was made primarily to explore an area of bushland bounded approximately by Hansen's Rd. Grubbed Rd. and the main highway at Enfield.

The convoy of ten cars made its first stop on Grubbed Rd. Much of the forest had been control burnt earlier in the season but there were beginnings of a lush growth of fresh green. The dormant seeds of hardenbergias, kennedias and acacias, which the fire had aroused, were showing a marvellous germination.

During our bush wanderings we found much to excite us. Nestling into the surrounding undergrowth, some little plants of the autumn flowering Eriochilus cucullatus, more commonly known as Parson's Bands, caused much interest. We also found some of the last of the season's flowers of the striking hyacinth orchid - Dipodium punctatum. This is widespread in Victoria and is a leafless saprophyte. Not so conspicuous, because it grows so close to the ground, was the swamp isotome - Isotoma fluviatilis, with masses of starlike blue flowers.

Perhaps the chief occupation of members during the afternoon was dodging the many spider webs that clothed the bushes and trees. Much photographed was a Gastracantha minax - the beautiful jewel or horn spider, that clings to its lovely symmetrical web.

During the afternoon, the bird watchers, with patience and sharp eyes, observed a variety of birds that frequent the peppermint/stringybark type of forest that is to be found at Enfield. Sightings included the spectacular blue wrens, white-throated tree creepers, grey thrush, grey fantail, red-browed finch, striated thornbills, beautiful scarlet robins and striated pardalotes.

Finally an observant member found a fresh regurgitated casting, perhaps from the boobook owl. A late afternoon tea concluded a very enjoyable outing.

P. Murphy.

EXCURSION TO LAKE BURRUMBEET 24-3-1979.

A small group accompanied Greg. Binns on a half-day excursion to Lake Burrumbeet, which is a natural drainage basin. The area near the caravan park was used by aborigines as a campsite, but other areas further around were taboo for them.

Our first stop was at Black Lagoon on the west side of Lake Burrumbeet. An extremely well made nest, possibly made by a goldfinch, was found nearby. A flock of galah flew overhead at a convenient time for us.

Our next stop at the Lake had a good bed of reeds and an attractive River Red Gum (Eu. camaldulensis). A number of these trees were observed around the foreshore

of the lake. Reed warblers were heard but not seen.

At our next stop there were countless robber flies and a flock of tree martins on the ground nearby. A good variety of water birds including coots, swans, cormorants and pelicans were observed on the water. Further around we saw a large flock of plovers near the foreshore. The afternoon was both enjoyable and informative and thanks must go to Greg. for his knowledge and organization.

BIRD LIST - LAKE BURRUMBEET:

Tree Martin (Petrochelidon nigricans); Australian Pipit (Anthus Novae hollandiae); Reed Warbler (Acrocephalus australus); Willie Wagtail (Rhipidura leucophrys); Australian Little Grebe (Podiceps Novae hollandiae); Australian Pelican (Pelecanus conspicillatus); Pied Cormorant (Phalacrocorax varius); Black Cormorant (Phalacrocorax carbo); White Egret (Egretta alba); White Necked Heron (Ardea pacifica); Black Swan (Cygnus atratus); Black Duck (Anas superciliosa); Grey Teal (Anas gibberifrons); Musk Duck (Biziura lobata); Coot (Fulica atra); Australian Spur Winged Plover (Vanellus Miles novaehollandiae); Silver Gull (Larus Novaehollandiae); Galah (Eolophus roseicapillus); White-plumed Honeyeater (Meliphaga penicillata).

G. Hocking.

ECOLOGY - THE STUDY OF COMMUNITIES: Concluded from the March Edition. (Compiled by Lindsay Fink.)

Although these changes are taking place around us we still have some control over their direction and extent, and one of the aims of the Conservationist is to create sufficient refuges for the native flora and fauna of this continent where the effects of this new evolution will be minimal. In these reserves representative sections of each major kind of natural Australian Community will be protected and where necessary managed in order to retain what nature has created over the millions of years during which the Australian environment evolved. If we can do this then we may ensure that no other animal, plant or bird will ever become totally

extinct through man's action.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

1. The first thing as a nature lover or responsible Australian is to help the various species gain time (a) by putting off the Total Destruction of Habitat, to do this bring pressure to bear on Legislators to ensure that these Sanctuaries are secure from man and introduced animals. (b) By providing recreational areas for holiday-makers etc. at a level that will not interfere with wild life. (c) Understand and support the work of National Parks Authorities who manage reserves. (d) Understand the work of Biology Dep. of Universities because they are the people who will gather biological data and interpret it.

2. Support the Aust. Conservation foundation and other Naturalist and Conservation Societies in your State. Because they represent a unified voice of Naturalist's opinion, local bodies are important in moulding public opinion and are often the most successful. Watchdogs against the alienation of reserves.

3. Join with us the Work of Survey. Australia is a huge continent and no matter how desirable it would be, Professional Biological Surveyors are not sufficient to do the job. Small mammals and birds are being killed all over Australia, some by accident, some in traps, some in post holes, etc. Do not waste these. Each animal sent to a museum is a step in the survey. Interest your friends in Natural History. If museums do not give you a response agitate until it is equipped and staffed well enough to identify accurately and survey energetically. Much has been left to Overseas workers. This is ridiculous, it should be our own museums.

4. Build up the State Authorities for conserving flora and fauna in your state. If you insist that the Health Dept. be adequately staffed, then apply the same criteria to your National Parks and reserves. Look at the laws, do they help conservation or are they merely regulations which protect, do they destroy public interest? Do they hinder biological surveys and the gathering of data upon which conservation depends, do they have power to prevent

destruction by mining or other activities in the environment of reserves?

5. Interest yourself in those species being exploited commercially, can they stand such predation? It is vitally important that cropping should be closely monitored so that estimates of the population can be worked out. Is there sufficient public money for this; it is only right that the humane treatment we apply to our domestic animals be given our wild ones. Only too well do we know of the brutality and cruelty associated with cropping of wild species. We must insist that these industries be strictly controlled.

6. Finally are we making full use of what land we already have in production? There is a great temptation to go on clearing land. Remember the employment of natural bush for recreation and conservation is a valid form of economic land use. It is wasteful to use when alienated land is not being used to its full.

WHY THEN CONSERVE?
Each species is the product of over six hundred million years of Evolution, and we ourselves are one of these. In destroying any one species we are destroying a facet of our potential - understanding of the world about us - we owe a responsibility to each other to see that this doesn't happen.

AUTUMN SOLILOQUY.

Now the long hot days of Summer have mellowed to the balmy days of Autumn come walk with me in my garden.

As the demand for plum jam has lessened, to the dismay of sundry blackbirds and starlings, the plum trees have all been replaced by native shrubs and trees. While admiring the sunlit jewelled carpet of dew on the neatly trimmed lawns our attention is drawn to a large fuchsia by the persistent buzzing of bees busy collecting nectar and pollen. This same bush is a great favourite with yellow-faced and white-eared honeyeaters and eastern

spinebills sipping the flowing nectar. This year there has not been so many visitors, I wonder why?

Look yonder at the tangle of silk on the floribunda rose. It is the web of a shiny jet black spider. If we look closely we will see the back of the abdomen, may be either all black and shiny or may be patterned with yellow and white spots, as well as having three pairs of spines. Hence the name jewelled or spiny spider - Gastracantha minax.

Despite the loss of the plum trees the blackbirds are still about as witness the pine-needle mulch scattered over the lawns and paths in their frantic hunt for worms. The correa bushes, backhousiana manni and reflexa each bear manu buds giving promise of good display this year. Melaleuca redbreast has had its best showing so far, about 50 blooms, probably due to the hot summer.

Grown by Edna from seed the fruit salad gum Eu. forrestiana has at last coloured beautifully, with many bud caps lifted, showing small white flowers.

Look at the lovely green caterpillar on the powder gum, Eu. pulverulenta. It is about as big as your index finger, with rows of yellow, red and blue hair clumps on its back and sides. After spinning a hard brown cocoon, and being a pupae for some time, will emerge as the beautiful Emperor gum moth.

What an odd spot on that leaf looking like bird droppings. Look closely and you will see it is a spider holding a small brown moth. This spider does not spin a web but just sits and exudes the scent of a female moth to entice males to their doom. It is the bird-dropping or orchid spider. Look over there on the Banksia ericifolia at that small brown ball. It is the egg-sac of the same spider and if you look closely you can see two minute spiders just hatched out. Scattered over the powder gum are many brown leaves caused by hosts of small caterpillars which eat the green parts of the leaves and leave the leaf skeleton to turn brown and die.

I hope you have enjoyed this short stroll with me, to enjoy the surprises and joy to be had in a small portion of Nature's garden.

P. Fry.